

Extended Essay English B Category III

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To what extent, influences of real and imaginary concepts in the novel “A Christmas Carol” can be associated with the development of the main character Scrooge.

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Abstract

This essay examines the impacts of the real and imaginary events on the main character Ebenezer Scrooge in the novel *A Christmas Carol*. It also includes the causes and effects of the events taking place in the novel, especially during the visitations of the ghosts in order to awaken Scrooge to the situation he is in. Considering the environment surrounding Scrooge along with the moral and social values, the intensity of the impacts left on him are discussed.

In this essay, the main aim is not to compare the effectiveness of the real and unreal scenes introduced to Scrooge; it is more like an examination of the reasons carrying Scrooge to this change. The characteristics of the society in the Victorian Period and the major theme of “Christmas” is taken into consideration in order to analyze more properly. The poor conditions in that period are thought to be acting as catalysts and having an important role in Scrooge’s profound change.

Dickens probably uses this character in the Victorian Period when most people are suffering from illnesses and improper life conditions, to show the contrast between a miserly old man and the ones that he is ignorant of. With the presence of the spirits, benevolence and charity is observed in Scrooge; which reflects that Dickens, as with the format of a fairy tale narrates Scrooge undergoing an impossible change.

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Introduction

Change is sometimes a challenging process and an effective impact is essential while adapting to it especially when it is applied to a person. In the novel *A Christmas Carol* written by Charles Dickens, the transformation of a cold and nervous old man, the main character Scrooge, to a charitable, kind and modest person is caused by the strong influence of real and unreal elements. The three spirits: The Ghost of Christmas Past, Present and Future introduce scenarios which are actually probable and necessary in a Victorian Period where people need a shelter for the chaos and disorder directing the society. On the other hand, positive consequences of reality shown to him result in an integration of the two opposite powers acting as effective transformers.

Spirits or ghosts are the symbols of excitement, stress and horror and they are not a part of the concrete world. Phantoms are usually known as imaginative creatures which are notorious for frightening people. In this novel as well, the statement of the three spirits as the only authorities in a bitter miser's life has an importance. This significance is apparent because although Scrooge is bothered by nothing except losing his money, he chooses to soften his soul and construct sensitivity towards the importance of human life. Throughout the novel and the steps of progression in Scrooge's perspective towards life, these spirits as a means of communication have a binding effect to the reality and only this unity would set Scrooge's hidden appreciated values free.

The "Christmas" concept has a very significant part in clarifying and indicating the emotional, ethical, social and economic aspects of the society; the environment Scrooge belongs to. It acts also as a catalyst in the change of Scrooge, helping him to feel more deeply and derive

the idea that everyone has the opportunity to taste happiness without inheriting a lot of property. It is also important that Scrooge completes his transformation amidst the sights and effects of a hectic Christmas scenery. Helping other people, especially poor people, hearing Christmas songs, watching people completing their preparation for the celebration always seemed a nonsense for Scrooge. Again with the help of this view, which is full of excitement and happiness, Scrooge changes with the help of both getting to know about human relations and irresistible ghosts.

Section One: Effects of the Imaginary Concepts

From the very beginning of the novel, it can be recognised that Scrooge strictly preserves his principles and his point of view only permits him to ponder about money and the power it provides. This materialistic reasoning of his can be expected to prevent him from considering supernatural or even theoretical phenomena. Due to these characteristic properties, it can be estimated that Scrooge will be appalled when he finds himself in the middle of a few phantoms and spirits. On the other hand it is remarkable of Scrooge for getting frightened and waiting for the first spirit, believing in Jacob Marley's ghost and finally showing an outstanding endurance.

The introduction of the imaginary concepts begins with the arrival of Marley's Ghost, when it is beyond question for Scrooge that his financial partner is dead. "*The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it:...*"¹ The phantom, the chains it wears, Marley's face Scrooge sees in the knocker, are all definitely unreal. However, that day before Scrooge came home everything was usual

¹ P. 1, Dickens, A Christmas Carol. '12th ed'. Longman Group Limited, 2005

because Scrooge treated his clerk, the singer singing a Christmas Carol, his nephew Bob and the gentlemen hoping to raise some money for the poor, rudely as usual. Since Scrooge handles similar tasks everyday, the appearance of Marley's ghost and other spirits respectively, traumatizes him and prepares a foundation for Scrooge's blossoming; persuading him impossible things can happen, including his renewal which seems unachievable.

Marley was probably one of the most effective people in life for Ebenezer Scrooge because he was a man enrolled in the most charming and indispensable business for Scrooge: he was his financial partner and they used to be concerned about money together. For Scrooge to be acquainted with the unreal conquerers (spirits), Jacob Marley is a suitable person to warn and prepare Scrooge for the uninvited guests. *"I am here to-night to warn you, that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate."*²

Scrooge's fear and curiosity in hopelessness can be understood with the opening of the Second Stave. *"He resolved to lie awake until the hour was past; and considering that he could no more go to sleep than go to Heaven, this was perhaps the wisest resolution in his power."*³ Scrooge's change starts also. It can be understood from his behaviour when his stress over the spirit is considered. A spectre is not relevant to financial issues and the daily worries Scrooge has. The first problem arising between Scrooge and the Ghost of Christmas Past is about the intense light on the ghost's head. When Scrooge wants to cover it, the spirit shows a great reaction: *"Is it not enough that you are one of those whose passions made this cap, and force me through whole trains of years to wear it upon my brow!"*⁴. In this way Scrooge once again receives an offensive response from an unreal creature and begins to

² P. 17, Dickens, A Christmas Carol

³ P. 21, Dickens, A Christmas Carol

⁴ P. 23, Dickens, A Christmas Carol

respect it or at least tries to seem respectful towards the spirit in order to prevent the terror it causes. Fear is important for maintaining his obedience.

The first spirit can be accepted more as a part of reality, considering its mission which is to show Scrooge his past life. The past is his real past so the aim of this journey is to warn and disturb Scrooge by reminding him of the old, gloomy days. However this time, everything remains not the same because the spirit serves him the same location but with shadows. The first spirit firstly shows him his childhood, the moments he spent in loneliness when he was a boy. Scrooge is appalled when he turns back to his old and miserable situation and he is so affected that he sobs when the spirit says: "*A solitary child, neglected by his friends, is left there still*".⁵ As the spirit pulls him to his other bitter memories, Scrooge gets thoughtful and begins to cry, remembering how poor he was. Scrooge then, for the first time, utters some words that nobody would expect from him because he feels regret for the boy singing a Christmas Carol at his door that night. This part of the novel, especially these words Scrooge says are very significant because the name of the novel is "A Christmas Carol" and a carol is included only twice; the first is in the beginning of the novel where Scrooge feels furious toward the singer and the last is the first proof of charity Scrooge shows in the Second Stave.

Scrooge realises that not only for all people but also for his relatives, he never felt responsible, ignoring their dependent and stressful lives drowning in poverty. The first big impact applied on Scrooge is showing him his past with all the unwanted and dark memories he had. This prepares a softer mind in Scrooge to criticize people who need help and support in those Christmas days, by reminding him of his painful life before he neglects dependant people.

⁵ P. 24, Dickens, A Christmas Carol

Scrooge can not resist because the supernatural power acts as a mirror standing directly opposite to him and showing all his weaknesses and pitiful memories.

It can be regarded that from the arrival of the Ghost of Christmas Present, the events include mostly unreal situations. This is because Scrooge is visited by the ghosts in one single night on Christmas Eve and the scenes the second spirit introduces are about Christmas, so at least the following day. The second spirit is mentioned as joyful and genial so it would not be very wrong if the spirit is estimated as a good partner for Scrooge during this part of his transformation. The Ghost of Christmas Present offers Scrooge a colourful view which includes lots of different food prepared for Christmas. The sight Scrooge comes across is appreciably unusual and probably nonsense for Scrooge's custom but this time Scrooge shows no anger and reaction surprisingly. He even wants to follow the spirit as soon as possible in order to be taught more. *"...conduct me where you will. I went forth last night on compulsion, and I learnt a lesson which is working now. To-night, if you have aught to teach me, let me profit by it."*⁶ From these words of Scrooge, it can be understood that Marley's ghost and the first spirit have already affected Scrooge in a way that Scrooge wants to get to know more about his own life that he has never known.

Scrooge becomes more impressed when the spirit takes him outside and they tour around the people preparing for the celebration. The most outstanding unreal incident of this section is the ghost's sprinkling of incense on people's dinners from his torch. Since this torch is also useful to maintain a good mood among the people, Scrooge's curiosity makes him ask the spirit a few questions. From the answers the spirit gives, he learns more about the importance

⁶ P. 39, Dickens, A Christmas Carol

of happiness for poor people and makes one more promise when the ghost reminds him of his painful end. “...*Remember that, and charge their doings on themselves, not us.*”⁷

The event taking place at the end of the third stave, the introduction of “Ignorance and Want”, plays a crucial role in Scrooge’s change. The Ghost of Christmas Present reveals his most significant message through these two children. When the spirit reminds Scrooge of his point of view which is based on ignoring poverty - “ ‘*Are there no prisons?*’ said the Spirit, turning on him for the last time with his own words. ‘*Are there no workhouses?*’”,⁸ it can be understood that Scrooge not only begins to feel pity after a long time but also starts again to evaluate himself and his thoughts more deeply before the second spirit leaves him.

In the opening of Stave Four, the appearance of the last spirit brings gloom, eternal silence and mystery; these aspects of this arrival can be considered as foreshadows of the unknown and uncertain future that Scrooge has the opportunity to reset. It can be understood that Scrooge’s perspective has apparently shifted in the way that he clearly states his fear for the spirit and waits readily to complete his renewal: “*But as I know your purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to live to be another man from what I was, I am prepared to bear you company, and do it with a thankful heart.*”⁹ The expressions of Scrooge show how he succeeds in assessing his own behaviour and chooses to purify his soul, which is an unpredictably fast decision for him to make.

The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, in deep silence shows him the probable sad endings that he may come across in the future. He, with the spirit, realises that he is also a part of mortality and sooner or later he will face death. The events leading Scrooge to think about

⁷ P. 43, Dickens, A Christmas Carol

⁸ P. 58, Dickens, A Christmas Carol

⁹ P. 60, Dickens, A Christmas Carol

charity, giving importance to human life and to feel regret and pity are so dark and effective that Scrooge shows these reactions. The last spirit also shows Scrooge how corrupted human beings are when they are concerned by money. One of the signs of regret in this stave can be observed if Scrooge's attitude towards Tiny Tim's death is analysed. At the beginning of the novel Scrooge scorns the men who arrive at his warehouse and wants to get rid of them stating that he will not be concerned about them. In the fourth stave, however, Scrooge is so affected when he sees the poor and mourning family.

The phantoms unite real and imaginary events so intensely that Scrooge cannot decide whether the real events he lived through were true. Likewise, when the Ghost of Christmas Future shows him his end, he is so affected that it takes time to realise that he is not dead and suffering yet. In this way Scrooge understands more about the real life over which he pulled a curtain, learns empathy and sympathy, suffers from the actual pain that people suffer from, along with a flood of emotions that he never paid attention to before. *"I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present and the Future. The spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!"*¹⁰

The phantoms and the lives people live do not only remind Scrooge of the financial problems people have. Ghosts give outstanding importance to reflecting emotions also. The scenes are effective for Scrooge because he can clearly see that a good mood is always important to be happy, so being happy is not as meaningless as he thought the day before. He realises with the help of these various events which fill the emptiness in his soul, that being miserly and having money only contributes to his isolation from society.

¹⁰ P. 74, Dickens, A Christmas Carol

Section Two: Effects of the Real Concepts

As can be foreshadowed by the names of the staves of the novel, only the last staff does not include supernatural elements (Staff One: Marley's Ghost, Staff Two: The First of the Three Spirits, Staff Three: The Second of the Three Spirits, Staff Four: The Last of the Three Spirits, Staff Five: The End of It). This foreshadowing is probably valid when the unreal events and visitations by spirits in the first four staves are considered. The staff including the highest number of real elements is the last staff; the first staff and the second staff follow it respectively due to the presence of spirits in them.

In the first staff, it can be observed that Scrooge needs to be almost forced in order to gain the softest emotions felt in life. Scrooge does not bother with anything except money, including Marley's name painted above his warehouse door although he died a long time ago. Scrooge's point of view towards life and the way he treats his relatives also shows significant characteristics of him and his soul. The conversations of Scrooge included in this staff indicate his thoughts and attitudes towards the poor and people seeking enough money to continue to live in that period. "*If they would rather die, they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population.*"¹¹ Scrooge can be regarded therefore as cruel and uninterested in helpless people suffering in the insufficient conditions; lacking healthy nutrition and fighting with diseases.

Starting from the first spirit visiting Scrooge, all spirits include something concrete and somehow real; the chains, the cold weather, the same streets, same people, same surroundings.

¹¹ P. 7, Dickens, A Christmas Carol

Scrooge is not separated from the reality, the environment he belongs to, even when he is taken away by the ghosts. The Ghost of Christmas Past is especially effective on Scrooge because this spirit is the first spirit after Marley's Ghost's arrival, whose mission is to impose some emotions to remove the filthy atmosphere in his mind and soul.

Among the staves containing spirits, real events or events that are likely to happen can be observed mainly in the second stave, with the Ghost of Christmas Past's arrival. The first spirit is the first unreal stranger that he waits for and for which he tries to prepare himself. This ghost is also functional in preparing Scrooge for the arrival of other ghosts and especially the scenes he will face with them. The Ghost of Christmas Past, in other words, not only reminds Scrooge of the unhappy days he had but also makes him feel the power of the supernatural visits he is going to face.

The Ghost of Christmas Past shows him the joyful ball for Christmas when he was an apprentice of Mr. Fezziwig. In this way the spirit makes him remember those happy days with less money in his pocket. In addition to this he is shown his loneliness, his girlfriend who he left due to his ambition for money, the days he cried. With the effects of these scenes, Scrooge also shows progression and achieves an ability to see from other poor and sad people's perspectives.

Due to the change in the regular order of time caused by the ghosts, Scrooge thinks he is taken away by the second spirit at Christmas and he sees many events which can occur in daily life, including the joy in Tiny Tim's house, and the people trying to prepare their meals for Christmas in the streets. In addition to these events, the conversations at Tiny Tim's house have an important effect on Scrooge's point of view which is gradually changing. The event

that makes him impressed and feel angry at himself is the happiness in this house despite the challenging conditions. It can be regarded as a helpful scene for Scrooge, preparing him to get rid of his approach to happiness based so far on issues related with money. The wife of Scrooge's nephew rejects Scrooge as the Founder of the Feast and reacts rapidly: "*I'd give him a piece of my mind to feast upon, and I hope he'd have a good appetite for it.*"¹² Besides this conversation she also states very angrily that Scrooge is odious, stingy, hard and unfeeling and this can be considered as having a strong impact on Scrooge making him question his behaviour. The events taking place in their house are not actually a part of reality but since they are likely to happen in the future and the characters are parts of his daily life, it will not be wrong if they are taken into consideration.

The last stave includes purely "the changed Ebenezer Scrooge" and contains no more spirits in order to complete his change, but from his actions and thoughts the intensity and results of the change can be examined. Although all the events happen in a single night, when Scrooge goes outside on the first day of Christmas, his behaviour and thoughts differ in such a way that it is hard to believe that Scrooge was that cold, mean man just the previous day. After all the visits of the spirits, on the other hand, it would probably be odd if he showed no progression in his attitudes. The events taking place in this stave clearly summarize the victory of Scrooge's treatment achieved with the help of the journeys he had with the three spirits.

The way and method of Scrooge's "renewal" includes events that are impossible in daily life but this transformation can not be regarded as a passive one. The reason for waking up, being a happy and generous man is not only the spirits. Scrooge himself manages to complete this

¹² P. 48, Dickens, A Christmas Carol

process. He, despite all the habits and principles he thought he could not leave, decides to take the road that he had never thought to take before. Therefore, it can be understood that although it is clearly stated that Scrooge is cold, nervous and extremely mean, he actually contains ashes of emotions somewhere in his soul. By the end of the visit of the last spirit, after a long time a fire has started again from these ashes; the heat and illumination symbolise certainly his new positive perspective towards charity and love for human beings. *“I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a school-boy...A merry Christmas to everybody.”*¹³

The real elements are mostly embedded in supernatural events to increase the effectiveness of the causes that lead to the rebirth of Scrooge. Therefore, it is not surprising that nearly all of the real elements have relevance to the experiences Scrooge has with the spirits. Besides, it is needed in order to complete the changing process because it can not be stated that a person can change easily without having a lesson from the world the person belongs to. Briefly concrete examples were certainly essential, so the imaginary events included mostly real incidents.

Conclusion

Scrooge, at the end of the book, prefers to choose to be a sympathetic, generous, happy man and the first result of his decision is the present he gives to his nephew's family. This behaviour of his represents the power of the integration of the real and imaginary concepts and the encouragement they send forth. This last attempt of Scrooge summarizes the success

¹³ P. 75, Dickens, A Christmas Carol

at the end of all the effort the spirits make aiming to save Scrooge from the negative consequences.

The change occurs finally but the process is the most important aspect of the context. Scrooge may not be obedient and he might even have rebelled more choosing not to change his behaviour if the process was harsh and included only violence. In this process, as it is known, the spirits show him all the negative consequences of his actions along with the happiness of the people feeling optimistic and being less concerned by money. It is a catalyst in Scrooge's decision because he looks from a point that he have never looked from before and sees all the aspects of happiness in spite of his empty and dark life. He is given the opportunity to reset his attitudes for a colourful, bright new life.

Considering all the events having a role in the change in Scrooge's character, it can be concluded that the transformation is completed only in the presence of spirits which are not a part of the real world. However, the change is achieved by the addition of some real situations that Scrooge lived through in the past along with the possible events of the future. By revealing Scrooge's emotions, along with all the real and imaginary events, Scrooge in a very short but dense period completes his mission to be at peace with the outer world and especially with himself.

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